

Project Acorn

A Cost-effective Modular Environmental Management System Support Programme



Do you want to improve your and/or your suppliers' environmental performance?
Do you want to enhance your and/or your suppliers' EMS through implementing ISO 14001?
Do you want to achieve ISO 14001 certification and/or get your suppliers certified to ISO 14001?

What is Project Acorn?

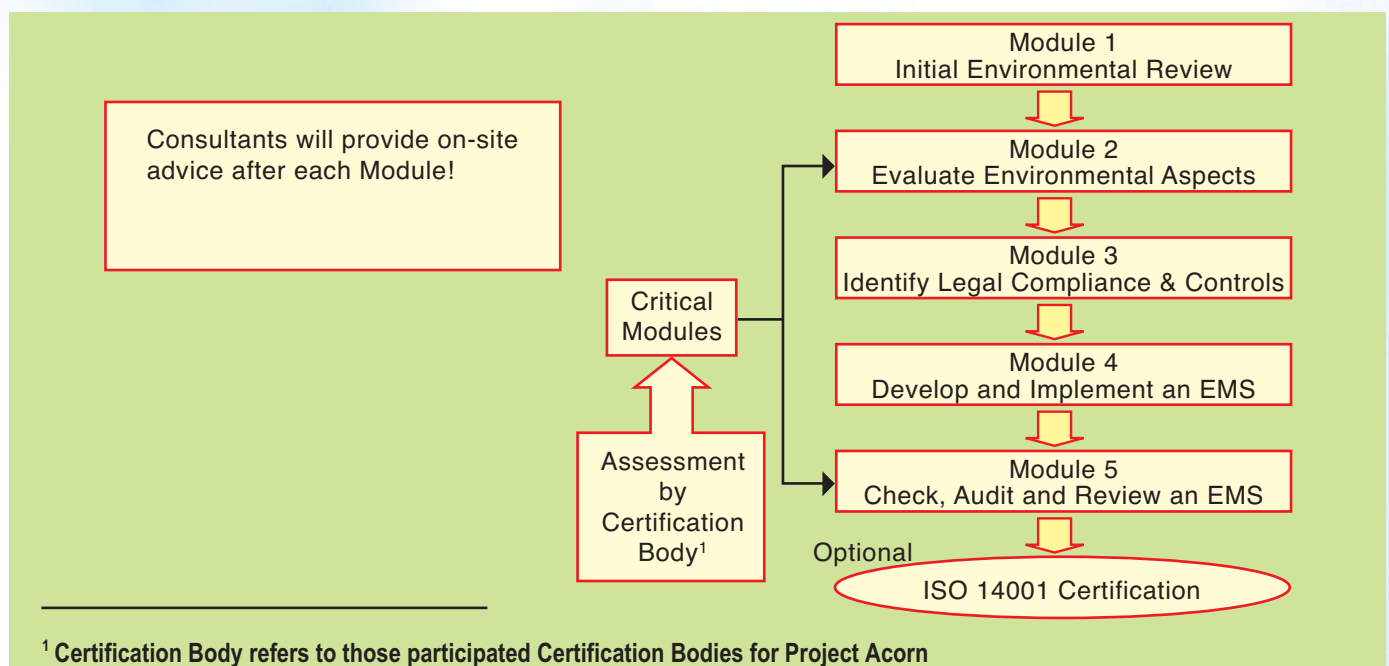
Project Acorn is a support programme to assist local organisations to improve their environmental performance. The programme offers a 5-module approach to implement an environmental management system (EMS), based on the ISO 14001 Standard and to develop performance indicators in line with the ISO 14031 Standard. Project Acorn which was originally developed in the United Kingdom has been successful and is increasingly being adopted internationally to engage a wide range of organisations in EMS development. A new British Standard BS 8555 on the staged implementation of EMS was published in 2003 reflecting the experience of the Acorn project.

How does the programme work?

As illustrated in the flow chart below, Project Acorn comprises 5 modules providing a step-by-step framework for EMS development and implementation.

At each module, nominated staff (maximum 2 staff) from each participating companies will receive training so that they will be able to acquire the knowledge and skills for developing their organizations' EMS and associated environmental performance indicators. The training will be very practical relying on interactive workshops for maximum effect. Each training will equip the staff with the information and understanding necessary to successfully complete the relevant module. Throughout all the 5 modules, the participating companies will also be provided with on site technical assistance and telephone help-line support from EMS experts from HKPC and BEC. A handbook will be provided to participants for additional guidance.

After successful completion of modules 2 and 5 (critical modules), the organization is assessed by Certification Body¹ to ensure that the requirements of the associated module(s) have been met. The participating companies will therefore gain healthy inspection and recognition by a professional and independent party for their efforts in the adoption of EMS principles upon completion of these critical modules.



Who should participate in the Programme or be nominated?

- All local organisations, including both SMEs and large organisations that have a management commitment to improving their environmental performance in a holistic and systematic manner, should participate in the programme.
- Large organisations who intend to address the environmental impacts arising from their supply chains and to align their environmental objectives and performance indicators with their suppliers are welcome to act as mentor and/or to sponsor their suppliers to participate in the programme.

It is targeted to recruit 20 local organisations to join the programme. Participating companies can either be self-financed or sponsored by mentors.

Timeframe of the Programme

This programme will commence with an initial information seminar in May 2004, followed by 5 training sessions. It is expected that the programme will start in June 2004 and will last for nine months.

How much will Project Acorn cost for participating companies?

The Project Acorn participation fee will depend on the size and business nature of the participating companies as tabulated below:

Type of Company	Fee (HK\$) ⁽²⁾
SMEs ⁽¹⁾	52,000
Large Organisation	75,000

Note:

- (1) SMEs refer to companies with not more than 50 and 100 staff for servicing and manufacturing sectors respectively.
- (2) The fee includes training fee, consultancy fee and fees for certification body to carry out inspection at level 2 and level 5 for companies located in Hong Kong. Should companies having premises outside Hong Kong wish to join the programme, the participation fees will be adjusted accordingly to cover transportation and administration costs.

Should the participating companies wish to achieve ISO 14001 certification, there will be extra fee payable to the certification body, the amount of which is dependent on the size and business nature of the company. For reference, the ISO 14001 certification fee for SMEs generally may cost HK\$18,000 – 90,000 and the fee for a large company of 1,000 peoples in general may cost HK\$ 85,000 – 150,000. However the participated certification bodies will offer **special discount** for Project Acorn participating companies to achieve ISO 14001 certification.

It is important to note that SMEs are eligible to apply for the SME Training Fund of the HKSAR Trade and Industry Department. The amount of grant for each successful application will be equivalent to 70% of the training expenses, subject to a maximum of HK\$10,000 or HK\$20,000 for employer and employee respectively.

Experience in Hong Kong

Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) in collaboration with Business Environment Council (BEC) introduced the first Project Acorn in year 2002 with funding support from the SME Development Fund administrated by the HKSAR Trade and Industry Department. The programme brought together large organisations (mentors) with their suppliers (small and medium sized enterprises, SME) to develop EMS. There are altogether 8 SMEs participating in the first programme, which are now in the final stage to develop and implement the EMS. It is anticipated that the first programme will be completed in May 2004.

Why Project Acorn is needed?

Local organisations are facing tightening environmental legislative requirements and increasing concerns on their environmental performance. The most effective way to demonstrate the commitment to comply with legal requirements as well as to improve environmental performance is to develop and implement an effective EMS according to the ISO 14001 standard. Up-to-now, there are about 300 ISO 14001 certificates issued for Hong Kong companies. Many companies, especially SMEs want to improve their environmental performance but do not know where to start or where they can get reliable and good quality advice. In addition they face barriers to developing EMS due to lack of resources and awareness. Project Acorn addresses these needs by assisting the participating companies to develop and implement an EMS through a "bite-size chunks" approach. In this way, the participating companies will be able to establish and run an EMS in different affordable modules that have been carefully designed to cope with SMEs' resources constraints. Professional guidance will be provided to individual participating companies during each module according to their own requirements and needs.

Benefits of Project Acorn

The modular approach of Project Acorn will overcome the traditional barriers facing SMEs such as lack of man-power or finance resources. System development is simplified through this modular approach allowing participating companies to develop systems in stages. The participating companies will also have the option to gain recognisations on completion of the critical modules, with the aim of ultimately achieving ISO 14001 certification.

In addition, tangible benefits will be obtained by the participating companies in terms of operating efficiencies and cost savings. Internal benefits from EMS implementation include increased efficiency in resource usage, improved employee motivation, and better quality of management and training. External benefits include customer satisfaction, improved competitiveness, reduced pollution, resource efficiency, assurance of legal compliance and improved public image. These benefits have been demonstrated by the Project Acorn programmes both in UK and Hong Kong and companies attained ISO 14001 certification.

How to get more information?

For more information on Project Acorn, please contact the following personnel.

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